

thoughts, or a flat earther, can he use his lecture time to expound these views? What about the students' right to learn some mathematics? Or linguistics? Or literature? Or politics? Of course in most western universities he can, should he so wish it, organise a Mao circle or a catechism circle, and he could expound his views there. In some places (and this goes against the assumption, mentioned previously, that all universities can be generalised about) he might be ill-advised to do so. If he were a lecturer at Makerere, or at Patrice Lumumba, he might be wise to refrain from such activities.

And this:

'As both students and staff in universities are adults no special regulations should govern their relationships.'

There is another subliminal message here: that the relationships between adults are entirely free in society, and not governed by regulations.

'Struth! A well-defined discipline has the role of regulating the relationships of adults. It is called law.

It exists everywhere — from customary laws, tribal taboos, to complicated codes in technically developed societies. All laws, ultimately, deal with the relations of people with one another — whether they are all adults, or not. There are the laws of persons, family law, the law of succession — these

regulate the relationships of adults with one another as well as, frequently, with children. Less obviously, all other regulations come down ultimately to human relationship, mostly with adults. The criminal law says I may not murder my fellow citizens, adults though they may be, nor rob them, nor burn their houses down. The law of Torts says that even if I have no wicked intentions, I may not damage their person or their property through carelessness. Commercial and company laws try to minimise the possibility of my diddling other adults through sharp practice, fraud, and so on. Constitutions make sure — well they try to make sure — that one set of people does not coerce and enslave others. One could go on endlessly. In some cases of course there are extra safeguards for children and young people — but who in his right mind can suggest that there are no special regulations governing adult relationships? Life is full of them.

The rules governing certain professional persons in their dealings with their clients are full of regulations governing adult relationships.

One wonders just how much effect all these inuendoes and this "newspeak" have on the unsophisticated in forming their convictions and prejudices. One further asks oneself of what value the extensive use of a dilemma or "forced" choice questionnaire of this type and so fraught with inuendoes is in that search for truth to which we are all committed.

WHAT HAPPENS TO DEFERRING STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

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Background

The enrolment statistics of several Australian universities have been showing an annual increase

in the number of students requesting deferment of their enrolment as is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Deferment Trends 1974-1977¹

UNIVERSITY	1974 Defer- ments Granted	1975 Subse- quently Enrolled	1975 Defer- ments Granted	1976 Subse- quently Enrolled	1976 Defer- ments Granted	1977 Subse- quently Enrolled	1977 Defer- ments Granted
U.N.S.W.	253	64(25%)	338	90(26.6%)	659	149(22.6%)	894
Sydney	72*	—	439	—	530	328(61.8%)	689
Macquarie	144	69(47.9%)	106	80(75.4%)	343	63(18.37%)	278
New England	37	16(43.2%)	216	36(16.7%)	547	68(12.4%)	1367
Monash	287	120(41.8%)	353	208(58.9%)	462	250(54.1%)	396
Melbourne	163#	97#(59.5%)	253	—	249	—	281

[#]Faculties of Arts, Science, Law, Medicine, Economics and Commerce only.

*Deferments granted only under exceptional circumstances.

This trend is looked on with favour by the authorities who feel they will be dealing with more mature and committed students, and by the students who like a year away from the pressures of study.

In 1974 the University of New South Wales adopted a policy of automatically granting a year's deferment provided reasons were given for seeking it and unless the applicant requested deferment in order to pursue studies at another tertiary institution. Since 1975 the Tertiary Education Research Centre of the University has been engaged in a continual monitoring of these students, and by studying official records such as the Metropolitan University Admission Centre (MUAC) computer print-outs, enrolment records and lists of examination results, and by contacting students by phone, letters and questionnaires has built up a store of data on various aspects of student deferment.²

Students Who Do not Enrol After a Year's Deferment

What was evident from the first was that only approximately a quarter of those students requesting deferment in one year actually enrolled at this University in the next, so in 1976 and 1977 questionnaires were sent to those students who did not enrol after their year's deferment in an effort to find out what they were doing instead. In 1976,

110 of the 149 respondents, and in 1977, 220 of the 310 respondents were enrolled in other post-secondary institutions. Attendance was divided between universities and other post-secondary institutions, such as Colleges of Advanced Education and Technical Colleges, in the ratio of four to seven respectively, and in the main those at other universities had enrolled there because they lived in the vicinity, or would find travelling easier than if they had come to the University of New South Wales.

In both years it was noticeable that the percentage of deferring students living in rural areas or small towns with less than 5,000 inhabitants was far greater than for first year students at the University as a whole. This trend was even more pronounced among the respondents who had not enrolled at any post-secondary institution—26% in 1975 and 29% in 1976. Nearly one-third of these people said that they had lost interest in university study for the time being, but from other replies it became apparent that the failure of some of these students to enrol had a connection with the poor economic conditions in some country areas.

After studying the MUAC computer print-out and checking the Higher School Certificate scores and preferences of students who requested deferment from the University of New South Wales the data in-

indicated that many did so if they had not been given their first preference for subject or university. Only half had been given their first preference compared with approximately three-quarters for the total MUAC student population. Examination of the questionnaire data revealed that over two-thirds of students who had enrolled at other universities had been given their first preferences, and that it was the students at other post-secondary institutions and those not enrolled anywhere who had not been given their first preferences. For those students there were several ways in which they could try to rectify the matter. Some returned to school in order to improve their HSC score, some were able to enter their preferred university on second round offers, and others enrolled at Colleges of Advanced Education or Technical Colleges where the cut-off point for entry to their particular course was lower than for this University. It was found that nearly one-third of all students requesting deferment had enrolled at other institutions in the same year and so invalidated their deferment. Presumably they had either been waiting for the results of applications to other institutions or regarded deferment as an insurance if they found their present course unsatisfactory.

Also significant were the HSC scores of those students who had gone to other post-secondary institutions rather than universities, or those respondents to the questionnaires who said that they had not enrolled anywhere. In both cases over two-thirds had lower HSC scores than the mean HSC scores of the pupils accepted into the same faculties. This was not the case for students at other universities.

The most interesting fact that emerged from analysis of the questionnaire data was the large percentage of students who changed their course preference from that in which they originally deferred—nearly half of those at other universities and two-thirds of those at C.A.E.'s enrolled in something entirely different. Even more surprisingly, the percentage of students changing their course preference was greater among students who had been given their first preference. The majority of them said that their new course was more suited to their capabilities and interests, and although this can be interpreted in several ways, it does bring into question the messages that school pupils get about university courses. While entry to differing university faculties is governed solely by the aggregate score of their HSC, pupils will see some courses as obviously more prestigious than others and will be encouraged to try for these with scant regard to real vocational aptitude. Looking at some of the preferences listed by prospective students on their MUAC forms, one wondered what factors influenced them in their choices and what part of the schools played in helping them to make realistic and informed selections. Obviously

some people were concerned with the high prestige courses, such as medicine and law, which have very restrictive quotas; presumably pressures from parents or schools were responsible for what appeared to be an inappropriate choice. Many preference listings appeared almost capricious in the lack of relationship between the courses mentioned, and it appeared that after the first one or two choices the others were filled in with little thought or care. What happened when these students were not given their first choice, and perhaps not their second or third, can well be imagined, and it was not surprising that many students requested deferment because they were "not sure of their aims", and that subsequently they enrolled at C.A.E.'s or technical colleges where they believed they would receive a more practical and job-orientated education.

Students Who Enrol After a Year's Deferment

Also studied since 1974 have been the students who deferred for one year and then enrolled at the University of New South Wales a year later. Research in the U.K.³ has shown that students who do not come straight from school are more successful as undergraduates than the average student—not so much in terms of final achievement, but in the percentages who complete their courses. Research so far at this university has shown a contrary result. In 1975 the wastage rate in the first year for deferring students was higher than for other first year students, whereas they received a 62% clear pass rate in their examinations, compared with a 54% clear pass rate for other students enrolled in their courses. In 1976 the trend appeared to be the same. Of the 90 students who enrolled at this university after a year's deferment, 34.4% dropped out during their first year, or failed to enrol for the second, compared with an estimated 29% for all first year undergraduates. In many cases these students had performed well in both their sessional and end of year examinations.

Only 7.7% left because of outright failure, although several discontinued without failure during the second session, having done poorly in the first. It was surprising to find that there was a bigger failure rate amongst those with a higher HSC score than the faculty means in which they were accepted than for those who had lower HSC score than their faculty means. Although we are dealing with small numbers, this does bring into question the predictive validity of using an aggregate HSC score as the sole requirement for entry into any given faculty. Of the deferring students who enrolled for their second year in 1977, 67.2% received a clear pass with no fails in the December 1976 examinations, compared with a 51.7% clear pass rate for the other students in their faculties. When an average of their marks was worked out in comparison with their faculty averages it was discovered that

74.1% of the deferring students had gained above-average marks.

From the evidence of the data it appeared that there were two distinct types of deferring students—those who were really committed to a university education at the time they requested deferment, and those who hoped to make a decision about their future during the year they took off. This idea was borne out by discussions with students who had enrolled at this university, and from comments by the respondents to our questionnaires who had gone to other post-secondary institutions. For the students who had proceeded successfully into their second year at university the deferment year was seen as a time in which they had matured and begun to see the world in a more realistic way. They felt that having to accept the constraints of a full-time job, or the responsibilities of overseas travel, had made them better able to face the demands of university life. They saw themselves as having more confidence than their peers who had come straight from school. Those at colleges of advanced education and technical colleges, or who were involved with on-job training schemes, felt the same, but added that the year's deferment had given them the chance to broaden their horizons and find out that there were other ways of gaining qualifications besides going to university. Some of them felt that these more vocationally orientated courses might well be a more appropriate way of gaining a useful qualification in the present economic climate.

The students who enrolled at the University of New South Wales after their year's deferment and subsequently discontinued without failure were a different case. Although they told various stories of disillusionment with university life, it seemed that their main reasons for dropping out were that they did not find their courses to be what they expected, and in some cases found them utterly boring. None of them seemed to have had any prior knowledge of the structure of their courses, and in some instances had only enrolled because they could think of nothing better to do and saw university enrolment as a socially acceptable way of passing the time until they could. Some of them said that they intend enrolling in another faculty or going to some other type of post-secondary institution in the future and it will be very interesting to follow them up and see if they do. According to Miller⁴ research in London showed that a large proportion of unsuccessful students at University College succeeded elsewhere, and in the U.S.A. a high proportion of college drop-outs intended to re-enrol.

It is clear that a year's deferment is of great significance to an increasing number of prospective students. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to leave the sheltered world of educational institutions and to work or travel as an adult member of society, with the responsibilities and constraints that these things bring. In turn this means that the student will deal with the various aspects of university life in a more mature and confident way. Secondly, it gives the students a chance to look at their futures more realistically and to make a more informed choice on the future education they need for their chosen careers.

Future Study

Further study of the various aspects of student deferment is planned by the Tertiary Education Research Centre of the University of New South Wales. The examination results of the 149 students who enrolled at this university in 1977 after a year's deferment will be compared with the results of their peers who came to the university straight from school, and those students who have dropped out or discontinued without failure will be contacted to find out why they have done so.

As well as this a computer program has been designed to use the relevant socio-economic information collected by many universities and colleges of advanced education from first year students for the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee's study of the social composition of students since the abolition of tuition fees. It has been possible to extract from the computer master tape the information given by all those students who took a year off between school and university and compare it with that of a random sample of an equal number of students who came to university directly from school.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Sources: the Registrar's office of each institution.
2. Barrett, Eve and Powell, J. P. *Deferring Students Who Did Not Re-enrol at the University of New South Wales in 1976*. R. and D. Paper No. 44. Sydney: Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of New South Wales, 1976.
3. Pearson, Margot. *Student deferments at the University of New South Wales 1971-1976*. Vestes 20, 33-34, 1977.
4. Weaving, Anne. *The Significance of Deferment for Students Who Did Not Re-enrol in 1977 at the University of New South Wales*. R. and D. Paper No. 48. Sydney: Tertiary Education Research Centre, University of New South Wales, 1977.
5. Orr, L. *A Year Between School and University*. Windsor: NFER, 1974.
6. Miller, G. W. *Success, Failure and Wastage in Higher Education*. London: Harrap, 1970, 247.